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ABSTRACT

Written primarily for supervisors, consultants, and university professors in reading and English education, this paper discusses the importance of effective graduate and inservice education. Two of the primary responsibilities of the professional supervisor are explained: to observe inservice teachers and listen to them talk about their problems, and to help teachers move beyond the limitations of their teaching situations so they might understand and implement a better instructional program. Three suggestions related to increasing the effectiveness of inservice and staff development programs are given: (1) inservice and staff sessions do not need to be limited to the needs expressed by the teachers involved, but should be based on these needs; (2) when supervisors are involved in inservice sessions, the administrators who work with the teachers involved should be part of the group and be advised in advance of the specific plans for the session; and (3) plans should be made in advance for follow-through on inservice and staff development sessions. Finally, some suggestions for adjusting the locations and structuring the courses in reading and English education are explicated. (TS)

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SITUATIONAL "GIVENS" AND GRADUATE AND INSERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION

Ultimately, teacher improvement and renewal rests in the hands of teachers themselves. This is not to say that supervisors, principals, consultants, and university professors cannot encourage teachers to learn, or that these resource persons are not responsible for helping them to make progress when they set about trying to improve. It is to say, however, that the locus of control over teacher growth resides, and properly so, with the teachers themselves. Effective graduate and inservice education begins with a teacher's recognition of personal strengths and weaknesses and with a felt need to improve. It is important for those of us who work with inservice teachers to accept the reality of this and to help the teachers with whom we work to accept it. Our own desires to help them renew and extend their talents can support and encourage, but not substitute for their desires to become stronger and better teachers. If they are to renew and extend their talents they must want to change and believe that they can change.

What Is Our Role?

What, then, is the role in teacher improvement and renewal of those of us who are supervisors, consultants, and university professors in

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reading and English education? First, we must observe teachers and listen to them talk about their problems and their needs. The ways in which teachers perceive their tasks and the demands made on them are central to what they will be willing to "attend to" when we conduct graduate classes and inservice education sessions. If we desire that they become involved in their own growth, our role is to make suggestions which relate to their expressed needs and appear within reach. Our task is to help them see that they can reasonably hope to implement the technique and use the information we do offer. Just as their own desire to change and improve is central to their growth is a "given" in their renewal, teachers know that the situational variables with which they contend greatly influence the probability of their being able to transfer a new understanding or technique from the workshop or university classroom to the working situation "back home." What we present to them is analyzed by them from this perspective. Our first responsibility is to recognize the authenticity of their demand that we justify our curriculum in light of their needs as they see them and as it is applicable to the needs of their students.

Our second responsibility is to help teachers move beyond the limitations of their teaching situations, to help them understand and implement a better instructional program. Depending upon their prior experiences and their present situations, this may require continuing verbal dialogue, input based on classroom observation, and additional follow-through instruction. The constraints of the time involved in a workshop

or demonstration, or an on-campus course of a few weeks duration, frequently do not facilitate such continuing dialogue and do not permit much, if any, on-site observation and support of a teacher's efforts. While each of us with experience is aware of the hurdles inherent in present structures which interfere with our changing this situation entirely, each of us can work to change, or at least to alter, it. This, whether we do or do not find it comfortable, must be a very real part of our role in graduate and inservice education in the next decade.

Planning Graduate and Inservice Education in View of Situational Givens

Teaching has always involved a complex and demanding set of relationships. Today it is further complicated by contemporary social crises frequently linked to the cresting of the industrial revolution, the increasingly widespread dissemination of the news via the mass media, and the effects of a rapidly expanding world population. Widespread social crises bear directly on the life styles and mind-sets of families, and individuals within those families. Whereas the classroom teacher has always been confronted by differences in students' personalities, interests, and instructional needs, at this point in time he/she is being asked to cope likewise with behaviors and attitudes on the part of students which reflect their responses to serious social upheavals. This is occuring at the same time that the demand for an increasingly higher level of literacy is becoming widespread. The role of a classroom teacher is thus being made proportionately more complex. Clearly, it is critical that in the next decade we relate our

graduate and inservice teacher education to the expressed needs of the classroom teachers with whom we work and to the needs of their students, and that we restructure the definition and framework of graduate classes and other inservice experiences which we require of or offer to our teachers in terms of the situations in which they find themselves working. There are several ways in which we might accomplish this in the future to a greater degree than we have in the past.

Planning and Implementing Inservice and Staff Development Programs

The following are suggestions related to increasing the effectiveness of inservice and staff development programs. Each of the suggestions has emerged from practical experience.

1. Inservice and staff development sessions, while they may not be limited to needs expressed by the teachers involved, should be be based on them. Classroom teachers, if we listen, will tell us what they perceive their problems and needs to be. We can help them to examine their own requests and find the help that they need.
2. When supervisors or outside consultants are involved in inservice and staff development sessions the administrators who work with the teachers involved should (a) be a part of the group, (b) have a separate session with the supervisor or consultant, or at least (c) be advised in advance of the felt need for and specific plans for the session(s). Too often the local school administrator is not well informed on these matters, and this increases the pos-

sibility that he/she may not understand them or support changes which appear to be needed.

3. Plans should be made in advance for follow-through on inservice and staff development sessions. Oral reaction and interchange at the time of a session can be followed by the teachers preparing written reactions. When possible, the teachers should also be free to request follow-through observation and feedback in their classrooms. If observation is not possible, there at least should be a later session with either the supervisor or consultant who conducted the workshop or someone in a leadership role in the local district who also participated in the session(s). Teachers who have begun to try to implement improvements in instruction based on the sessions will have different comments and questions than they had earlier. Teachers who have not been able to begin any changes may need help.

Locating and Structuring Graduate Classes

Graduate classes in reading and English education need not always be confined to the campus setting and to traditional structuring. When local school systems and university personnel develop close working relationships, courses within the usual "degree" curriculum can be tailored more closely to needs of the teachers involved. Quality in the academics of the courses need not be sacrificed.

The following adjustments in the location and structuring of courses in reading and English education have been found workable and helpful in a metropolitan* school system.

1. Courses can be located off campus in a school centrally accessible to the teachers who are to be involved and to their own classrooms.
2. A needs assessment from the perspective of the teachers involved as well as from the instructor's viewpoint can be conducted, and data obtained can influence specific content, sequence, and pacing of the work of the course.
3. The usual time modules can be adjusted to accommodate individual and small group instruction.
4. A series of two or even three related courses can be offered which involve the same students. A sustained experience of two or more semesters or quarters provides time for greater probing of related content, the deepening of personal relationships, and the "trialing" of techniques and strategies. Teachers involved can "go try" and come back with comments, questions, and requests for feedback.
5. Part of each participating teacher's work can be individually contracted and relate directly to the improvement of his/her instruction and the situational "givens" with which he/she is working.
6. When possible, observation in the teachers' classrooms can be built in as a part of the course(s).

*Fulton County, Georgia, Public Schools in conjunction with Georgia State University in Atlanta.

Approaching Either the Inservice Session or the Graduate Course in View of Situational "Givens"

Whether we are involved in inservice/staff development sessions or in traditional graduate courses, there are questions we can ask ourselves which can serve to keep our attention on blending our "content" with the needs of the teachers with whom we are or will be working. In advance preparation we should consider questions such as:

1. How does each part of what I am planning to present or require relate to

   what the teachers may already know or not know;

   the goals of the teachers;

   specific needs of the teachers' students;

   situational "givens" over which the teachers have no control, such as time, space, and materials realities and prior personal and school experiences of the students?

   To what extent and in what ways should this information effect how I approach my work and how I begin it?

2. What adjustments and preparations might the teachers have to make in order to start what I will recommend to them? Are they reasonable?

3. If the teachers begin to implement what I recommend will they be able to ascertain general and specific steps they need to take as they go along? Can I make what I am saying clear enough that they will be able to do this in view of their own teaching situa-

tions?

4. On what bases will they and will I evaluate the relative success or failure of their efforts? Will it be appropriate to use

   the teachers' standards and their observations of their own work;

   the teachers' evaluations of whether instructional and learning objectives were met;

   feedback from students involved, from supervisors or chairpersons, or from me;

   some measurement of effort and time expended in relation to benefits obtained;

   post test scores and raw score gains;

   impressions of how this work related to the total instructional program?

Admittedly, each of these major questions implies other questions, and imposing the total set of questions on ourselves implies careful analysis, as we plan for inservice/staff development sessions and for graduate classes, of what our purpose really is. The process is time consuming, but if we can ask these questions of ourselves and follow guidelines such as those suggested above for planning and implementing inservice/staff development sessions and for locating and structuring graduate classes, we stand a better chance of truly helping teachers to extend and renew themselves in view of their present teaching situations.